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Approved For Release 2005/03/24 : CIA-RDP82R00025R000400060005-1

SOUTH VIETNAM

10 March 1964

1. The situation in South Vietnam has not appreciably changed in the past two weeks or so, and is about as reported in the press:

a. General Khanh is able and energetic, but without political experience; doing his best to stimulate more effective GVN military and political performance.

b. South Vietnamese responses to his new regime are mixed. Despite applause for some improvements, many military and political figures are uncertain concerning their future -- and his. Certain governmental programs begun under Diem or Minh have ground to a virtual standstill.

c. There are rumors of dissatisfaction and coup plotting, some probably of a defeatist, pro-neutralist cast. Some such plotting is almost certainly taking place, though Khanh seems aware of it and is taking countermeasures.

d. The Viet Cong continue aggressive and the GVN is still unable to bring its military strength effectively to bear. The war effort is definitely not going well, but neither is it in danger of imminent, total collapse.

2. Within this setting, the situation may be said to be somewhat in a state of suspended animation -- pending current US/GVN policy determination.

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VINSON COMMITTEE BRIEFING

10 March 1964

SOUTH VIETNAM

- I. Since seizing power in Saigon on 30 January, Major General Nguyen Khanh has moved vigorously to consolidate his control and improve the government's image in the countryside.
 - A. Keeping authority in his own hands as premier, he has established at the same time a broadly based government representing major geographical regions, religions and political groupings.
 - B. He is trying to impose rigid standards of conduct for government officials and to demonstrate his personal interest in rural problems.
 1. In a nationwide broadcast on 7 March, Khanh outlined a series of specific targets involving land reform, economic development, social welfare activities, and strengthening of strategic hamlets.
 2. He has also decreed a pay raise for lower ranks of the regular and paramilitary forces.
 - a. These ambitious plans, coupled with a promise of the tax relief, may lead to increased requests for US financial aid.

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C. To try to develop a broad political base, Khanh has taken steps to rally support from the long-disaffected Hoa Hao and Cao Dai politico-religious sects, and to encourage organized labor and once-influential factions of the nationalist Dai Viet Party.

1. There have been some signs that these disparate groups hope to develop independent bases of power, and clandestine sources have reported some developing rivalries among them.
2. Early differences over lines of authority between Khanh and some Dai Viet members of his cabinet are now alleged to be resolved.

II. Some public and military circles continue to show little enthusiasm for Khanh and regard his takeover as part of a continuing power struggle.

A. Khanh has yet to provide evidence that the generals he ousted and arrested were plotting with the French, nor has he substantiated claims that the French are plotting his assassination.

1. He has also made some extravagant claims of military success.

B. There are reports of lower troop morale, especially among marines and paramilitary forces.

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- C. [] various of-
ficers in the airborne, armored, and Special Forces units have been approached on behalf of senior officers to support a coup against Khanh.
1. Khanh reportedly has placed agents in military units to neutralize coup plotters. He is continuing an extensive reshuffling of officers in key commands.
 2. While these moves risk reviving the political infighting which plagued the army under Diem, another coup could lead to a collapse of governmental authority or of the war effort against the Viet Cong.

III. The latest changeover in Saigon has added to the uncertainty and drift in the countryside in the face of stepped-up Viet Cong pressure.

- A. An upsurge of Viet Cong military activity followed Khanh's coup, although it was less prolonged than the drive after Diem's overthrow last November, which netted the Communists substantial territorial and psychological gains.
1. Security in ten provinces near Saigon and three in the north is now considered critical, and government programs in some areas have been at a standstill as a result of local personnel changes and lack of direction.

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IV. The Viet Cong are currently mounting a low rate of small-scale military attacks, but a relatively high rate of harassment, terrorism and propaganda. This contributes to undermining the effectiveness of the government.

A. The Viet Cong have the capability for more intensified military actions, and have largely held the initiative in the war since about mid-1963.

1. They have maintained a steady build-up of their regular military structure, now estimated at 24,700 men making up five identified regiments, 42 battalions and 84 companies.
2. The fire-power of regular units as well as their supporting militia (conservatively estimated at 60,000-80,000) has been improved through the capture of government automatic weapons and mortars, as well as through increased infiltration of such equipment such as light machine guns, recoilless rifles, and ammunition of bloc manufacture.
3. In addition, the Viet Cong have adopted their tactics to counter improvements in the government forces, and are scoring greater success against government aircraft and against the government's strategic hamlets.

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B. Viet Cong clandestine communications nets directed from Hanoi have undergone further expansion and sophistication during the past year.

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V. North Vietnam apparently is gearing itself to take maximum advantage of the South Vietnamese government's wavering position.

A. Hanoi is making increased efforts to generate diplomatic pressure for a change in the US policy of active military support for South Vietnam.

B. It has issued unofficial warnings that any "invasion" of North Vietnam would bring Communist China into the fray. Peking so far has merely issued a generalized statement of support for Hanoi.

VI. There has been only one terrorist attempt against Americans in Saigon in recent days, but evidence continues to point to a concerted Viet Cong terrorist campaign against American personnel in South Vietnam.

A. The Viet Cong's Liberation Front has broadcast warnings to South Vietnamese to stay away from American troops.

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- B. The US and South Vietnam have set up a joint committee in Saigon which is implementing increased security precautions against terrorism.
1. South Vietnam's police and security services, however, have been seriously disrupted by post-coup purges, and General Khanh has expressed the belief that the Viet Cong may soon "outflank" the newly implemented security steps.

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